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Man on a Mission

Jon Boogz's Joyful Quest to Bring Mental Health to the Forefront Through Movement and Storytelling



By **Leslie Dinaberg**

Tue Jun 24, 2025 | 4:37pm



The Juneteenth with Jon Boogz crew | Photo: Ingrid Bostrom

Our stories matter. How we tell them, when we tell them, where we tell them, and who we tell them to are all important pillars in the way we perceive ourselves and the way the world perceives us.

In a Juneteenth celebration he described as being “a medley to celebrate Black culture, to celebrate liberation, and to celebrate the greatness that Black artistry has given to the world,” director, choreographer, and visionary movement artist Jon Boogz shared some of his own personal stories with Santa Barbara last week, along with his heartfelt quest to bring Black men's mental health to the forefront of the conversation.

This special event at Center Stage Theater really was a medley; it featured several live dance performances, short film screenings, and a Q&A moderated by Boogz's frequent collaborator, the world-renowned street dance artist Lil Buck.



Jon Boogz | Photo: Ingrid Bostrom

Their UCSB Arts & Lectures collaboration last fall (read our cover feature [here](#)) was part of what inspired *Independent* photographer Ingrid Bostrom, an MCASB boardmember, to put together this event in collaboration with MCASB, who also had the museum open and a party on the Paseo Nuevo Terrace, as part of the celebration.

"Their artistry and presence left a lasting impression on me, as I believe it would for anyone familiar with their work," said Bostrom of the pair.

In addition to Boogz and Buck (who performed some of his mind-blowing piece "[The Swan](#)," originally done in collaboration with Yo-Yo Ma), performers included Cameron "Midas" Murphy, Amaleke "Kidd" Bradley, and King Mike, who are some of Boogz's favorite — and most frequent — collaborators.

Boogz also shared some of his own story of growing up in the inner cities of Philadelphia and Miami with a mother who loved musicals and rich street dance culture, then moving to Los Angeles to pursue a dance career before going to Las Vegas to work on the Michael Jackson Cirque du Soleil show.

"I think that was just the journey I was destined to take," said Boogz. "When I first moved to Los Angeles, there was really nobody doing what I was trying to do with my artistry. There were tons of street dancers from all over the world, but not everybody was trying to use the art form of street dance to tell powerful narratives and tell stories with actual substance and depth to them. It was very hard, because usually people kind of just go with whatever is successful, or they follow whatever trend is going to make them money or make them successful. But I wanted to stand out. I wanted to be different. I wanted to be myself, but I couldn't really see myself in the industry. There was nobody I could point to and say, 'Oh, that person is doing what I want to do or what I see in my head.'"



From left, Amaleke "Kidd" Bradley, Jon Boogz, and Cameron "Midas" Murphy on stage at the Juneteenth with Jon Boogz event in Santa Barbara, June 19, 2025 | Photo: Ingrid Bostrom



The work in Vegas gave him both time and financial freedom "to kind of figure out what I really wanted to do with my artistry. Before then, I was just trying to pay rent. I was street performing every day and just trying to figure out how to pay bills. When you're trying to figure out how to pay bills, you don't really have the time to figure out what your long-term goal is, what the longevity plan is," said Boogz.

Once he created his first couple of short films, he started to realize he really loved storytelling and directing and street dance. "And I'm going to find a way to mold all of those things that I love together to present just like my own unique style and approach."



Lil Buck on stage at the Juneteenth with Jon Boogz event in Santa Barbara, June 19, 2025 | Photo: Ingrid Bostrom

One of the early directorial projects Boogz shared was the short film *[Am I a Man?](#)* made in collaboration with social justice activist and attorney Bryan Stevenson. He also screened his Emmy Award–winning episode of *Blindspotting*, titled “Routines: The History/San Quentin Blues,” which in trying to explain the use of the N-word to their young son, tells the history of Black people in America through dance.

The show also included the first live performance of *MOTHER / SOBER*, a Boogz-directed short film set to the music of [Kendrick Lamar](#). It’s a powerful piece supporting POC and Black men with the idea that going to therapy, crying, being vulnerable, and sharing your feelings is a positive thing, and its message lies at the heart of Boogz’s next project as well.

He’s working on a new short film called *Mental Wealth*, which focuses on mental health in communities of color. He described the project as “a powerful, visually immersive film about three friends navigating the grief of losing their friend Sam to suicide. As they begin therapy, each confronts their own struggles with guilt, fear, and identity — especially Jon, who is burdened by deep personal loss. Blending dance, music, and memory, the film explores how healing can emerge through vulnerability, connection, and self-expression.”

Given Boogz’s passion for the subject, as well as his track record and talent, I have no doubt that *Mental Wealth* will be something incredibly special. If you are interested in learning more about the project and/or making a donation, see bit.ly/44n28rV.



Reading the newspaper of record in Santa Barbara while they were in town: Cameron "Midas" Murphy (left), Amaleke "Kidd" Bradley, King Mike, and Jon Boogz | Photo: Ingrid Bostrom

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